MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (M.I.S.)
2003 ANNUAL REPORT
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As Director of M.I.S., it is my pleasure to submit my fifth annual report on the state of the Town's Information Technology effort. As in private enterprise, the M.I.S. Department plays a variety of roles. On the one hand, it provides various common services to other Town departments: strategic planning, end-user support, system maintenance, etc… and, on the other hand, it has a number of specific operational responsibilities: various types of billing, payroll, etc… all handled by the Director and a Technology Specialist. As has been the case over the previous few years, demands from users continue to increase throughout the Town, both in scope as well as in number. This past year, though, there has been a particularly sharp increase in the Public Safety area where the use of technology keeps growing very quickly.

We continued to execute, in 2003, a strategy designed to allow us to grow smoothly without major upheaval. Every year, we modernize a segment of the technology infrastructure and we try to expand the types of services offered to departments. Overall, after the initial years that brought the first integrated computer system to Town Hall, our systems are now mature and well in place with a single one still needing to be replaced (a cemetery application). Yet, we continue to upgrade, better integrate and generally improve all of our components in a methodical way.

The infrastructure required by a modern information system is almost invisible but critically important. Our network redesign, now three years old, a joint proposal from the School, SPLEC (Shrewsbury Power, Light, Electric and Cable) and the Town technology departments, gave us a very fast and secure backbone to which we continued to add in 2003: for example, the connection speeds to the COA building and the Water Garage were increased ten-fold and all Police servers now communicate at 1Gb/s. All of our Town buildings are connected to each other over this network. A Network Advisory Group regularly meets to coordinate new developments and policies. Being effective while keeping overall costs under control is a major goal of the group and, as an example, it was decided to implement a centralized, common anti-SPAM method to drastically reduce the flow of unsolicited email.

This is the fourth year in our regular computer hardware replacement program and we have kept making good progress. The on-going evolution of software imposes new demands on machines and this program helps keep our equipment up-to-date without placing undue strain on the budget. The UNIX server hosting the Town's financial systems has been replaced, bringing much needed speed. In addition, the Accounting and COA offices were completely modernized. Of real significance was the major upgrade that took place in the Engineering department: state-of-the-art CAD (computer aided design) workstations and software have been deployed and every desktop upgraded. This will help that department maintain its high degree of professionalism.

Equally important were changes made to the Police department infrastructure: three new, efficient, rack-mounted servers replaced legacy systems used for communications with cars, police dispatch and general email and storage functions. This marked the retirement of the original Police server. The department is quick to adopt and use law enforcement technology: its Livescan Identix Fingerprint device makes it one of the few being able to quickly transmit fingerprints electronically to other public safety agencies and the acquisition of a multi-media PC video system allows it to view robbery videos, save images onto CD, print color snapshot of suspects and distribute digital media to other law enforcement agencies. The recycling of equipment, wherever possible, has also allowed us to handle the growth in demand fairly smoothly as older equipment has been installed in locations not previously served.

Standardization of the desktops software has pretty much been maintained and there is no general upgrade planned for the immediate future. The corporate anti-virus system has again demonstrated its value as serious virus infections continue to spread around the world in 2003. In search of better efficiency, speech recognition software has been very successfully used by the Town Manager. This is the first time such software was deployed in Town Hall and we will continue to look for valid opportunities to do so. In the Water department, the reads collection system was upgraded so that, in the future, some meters can be read through radio frequencies.

On the servers' side, a lot of activity took place at the Police department. PAMET, the critical software application controlling dispatch and incident reporting underwent a major upgrade to become a fully Windows-based system. The Police sub-network became the first one to fully support active directories and the latest versions of MSSQL and Exchange were installed successfully. On the Town side, the financial systems were also migrated to a new server and MUNIS, the primary software vendor used, remained a stable and important player on the national level. A Town CITRIX server has been deployed, allowing secure access, over the Internet, to an individual's desktop. This functionality has been regularly used by the Police and Fire Chiefs to stay in close touch with their departments while away.

M.I.S. remains involved with the various departments not traditionally associated with financial systems or not physically located in Town Hall. The computer lab, at the Senior Center, received some additional replacement equipment and we continue to provide adequate computing and printing equipment to be used for the Tax Preparation Assistance program offered by the Council on Aging to our senior citizens. M.I.S. also continues to participate in Town-wide Emergency Response meetings.

As mentioned at the beginning, the M.I.S. department also functions in a consultative capacity to the various Town departments, ensuring that each moves forward, from an information technology standpoint, without upsetting the integration that exists between each. This integrator role is even more important as we approach a period of difficult financial conditions.